Chapter 14

Creating an Inclusive and Motivational E-Learning Environment for LGBTQ+ Online Students in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

This chapter will cover the following topics: LGBTQ+ history, key terms, gender non-conforming, and e-learning attrition issues facing LGBTQ+ students. The purpose of this chapter is to present issues facing gender non-conforming LGBTQ+ students in the higher educational online system. This chapter presents best practices on how to create an inclusive and encouraging e-learning environment in order to increase matriculation rates. One strategy, amongst others, is on how to be more inclusive in Zoom rooms, using circumlocution, to switch from gender binary language to gender neutral language.

INTRODUCTION

I am Dr. Gary, and my gender pronouns are *they/them*. Take a few moments to reflect on how you personally feel about me using *they/them* gender pronouns. Perhaps, you instantly thought, "that does not make sense grammatically because Dr. Gary is a singular being and *they/them* are plural pronouns," or "*they/them* are not normal gender pronouns, *she/her* and *he/him* are," or "here is another person trying to be trendy." Perhaps you instantly assigned *male* as my gender based on my name (Gary) and were expecting to see *him/him* as my correct pronouns. Some readers may have enacted a growth mindset already and are knowledgeable with *neogender* pronoun usage, and others may have resorted to the comfort of a fixed mindset, relying on the societal constructed binary gender pronouns: *he/him*.

According to Dweck (2007), a person with a *growth mindset* believes they can learn new skills and think differently with effort and persistence. Contrarily, a person with a *fixed mindset* believes they cannot learn new skills or think differently about new concepts. At this moment, I want to empower you to

accept your initial feelings and thoughts about my introduction. The only mindset I ask readers to channel is a growth mindset. This will allow one to learn pertinent information regarding gender identity which can be utilized in e-learning environments and beyond. The knowledge one acquires will not only apply to e-learning but is transferable to one's daily life as well.

Now that a comfortable safe zone has been established, with a growth mindset as a commitment, this chapter aims to, first, establish a basic foundation of the history of gender, including terminology of gender and gender identity, nuances between gender identity and sexuality (concepts that are often confused), and gender expression. From there, the chapter will transition into looking through the lens of inclusion in the context of online education for non-traditional students. The focus will continue on presenting the current landscape and issues facing LGBTQ+ students in the online higher education space today, with an emphasis on gender identity. The chapter will highlight negative online experiences through archival data, ending with suggestions for how to implement professional tips (pro tips) to create a more inclusive and motivating online learning environment for LGBTQ+ students.

Basic Definitions of Key Terms

Before taking a historical journey into the history of LGBTQ+ concepts, it is important to recognize that our language has evolved over time. Many key term definitions in this section date back to scholars in the 21st century. It is vital to keep *perverse presentism* in mind when using modern terms. Perverse presentism is defined as "uncritical adherence to present-day attitudes, especially the tendency to interpret past events/definitions in terms of modern values and concepts." Concepts attributed to the LGBTQ+ community are not new, but some key terms and definitions have been applied to the concepts in an effort to seek understanding about how people choose to identify. Certainly, the LGBTQ+ community, like other oppressed minority communities, is not monolithic, as its colorful rainbow symbol demonstrates. However, it is helpful to understand basic key terms and definitions before navigating the large landscape of LGBTQ+ people's chosen way to identify and present themselves to the world. Listed are basic definitions of key terms associated with LGBTQ+ identity:

Ally

A term assigned to individuals who identify as straight and cisgender but support the acceptance and equality of LGBTQ+ individuals. Additionally, the term can be applied to LGBTQ+ individuals supporting other individuals within the community in which they do not identify (HRC Foundation, n.d.).

Cisgender

Cisgender defines an individual whose gender assigned at birth matches the gender with which they identify mentally (HRC Foundation, n.d.).

Coming out of the Closet

An expression commonly known to describe an LGBTQ+ individual who decides to openly share their identity with family, friends, and the world (HRC Foundation, n.d.).

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